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New York

President: Mr. Essy . . . . . (Côte d'Ivoire)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 95 *(continued)*

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

International Conference on Families

The President *(interpretation from French)*: I call first on the Parliamentary Secretary of State, Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Hungary, Mr. Mihály Kökény.

Mr. Kökény (Hungary): Let me state at the outset that the Government of the Republic of Hungary joined with pleasure and enthusiastic dedication in the United Nations initiative proposing that 1994 should be the International Year of the Family. Our pleasure and dedication were fuelled by the recognition that the family is a fundamental resource of the community and of society, and that, due to the manifold conflicts inherent in today's world, an increasing proportion of families need continual social support.

This need for support is particularly prevalent in today's Hungary. As members are aware, my country is in a state of transition. This process, accompanied by economic recession, has generated numerous social conflicts. Our Government and vulnerable Central and Eastern European Governments have been described as rowing between the Scylla of an overburdened State budget and the Charybdis of the political unpopularity of social budget reform offering less-than-universal benefits. This scenario requires increased efforts to educate the public about the viability of various options, about the long-term costs of attempting to maintain a virtually defunct system and about the strength of solidarity based on cooperating families.

In my country all significant political elements agree with the slogan offered by the United Nations for this special year:

> "Building the smallest democracy at the heart of society."

We understand and recognize that the family - the heart of society - is also the smallest unit of democracy. We believe that democracy begins with the family. A democratic society can be built on the basis of democratic families alone. Conversely, families that are democratic in their internal relationships can develop and function exclusively in democratic societies.

In Hungary the Year of the Family has, in accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations, been intended as neither a single, isolated action nor as a representative campaign. It has been considered as an opportunity to call attention to the problems of families and, as such, perhaps to start rational political and social actions with a permanently beneficial influence on the lives of families.

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The direct impact of unfavourable demographic changes on the life of the family is evident in the continuous reduction in the number of children per family in Hungary as well as in many other Central and Eastern European countries. This issue should not be considered exclusively from the standpoint of social policy. As we all know, a community of brothers and sisters creates a better and socially healthier environment for the child. The number of children is partially dependent on the scale of values prevailing in the family. For instance, how intense is the motivation and will of the parents to take on the responsibility of bringing up more children? On the other hand, there are also economic factors to consider: Are there enough resources to support more children without bringing the family's standard of living below the society average? We intend to consider both these factors in the course of developing Hungarian social policy. We are firmly committed to the development of a social policy that would provide more comprehensive support for families with several children.

With regard to governmental measures, the system of family allowances will be developed further in Hungary. We intend to introduce more measures favouring unemployed parents and impoverished families with several children. A child care allowance will be available on condition of citizenship as of 1 January 1995. The legislative preparations for the Act on Child Welfare and Protection have started. The Government will submit the draft bill to the Parliament early next year.

With this in mind, let me raise a point for further consideration. A United Nations statement on family-policy guidelines, similar to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, is lacking. Such a document may promote the elaboration of national family strategies in Member States. Perhaps the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development will dwell upon this issue.

The International Year of the Family has been marked by numerous national and international programmes in Hungary. Among the international events, we could mention the family conferences held jointly with our neighbouring countries. Many families met during these events, which shows that borders and walls previously separating them have now disappeared. I must also mention the noble gestures made by our families who have hastened to help refugee families that have been separated and driven from their homes. International charity organizations have been of great help in this work.

I would like to express our thanks to the representatives of the States present here who have informed us about their national programmes. We consider the Salt Lake City Family Patron City Programme to be an excellent initiative. Over 21 Hungarian cities have joined it, and in the years to come it plans to operate an international network among the family-patron cities.

I consider it very important to change our current concept of the family. Stepping out of narrow frames, it should be able to integrate the right to coexistence of all those who - as Austrian Minister Maria Rauch-Kallat put it so aptly at the Twenty-third Conference of Ministers of Family Affairs in Paris - form the community of generations bearing responsibility for each other within the family. We can now see the United Nations in the same way: as a family of nations bearing responsibility for each other.

In the course of the Year of the Family, Hungary has opted for the path of development by choosing the family. Our motto for the Year of the Family expresses this well: everyone needs a family, and the family counts on everyone. We thank the General Assembly for giving us this Year.

Finally, let me read out a message from Mrs. Zsuzsanna Göncz, wife of His Excellency the President of the Hungarian Republic, to the participants of the International Conference on Families in New York:

> "I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the valuable efforts made by the United Nations to look for solutions and responses to the burning questions of social problems we are facing today. I firmly believe that the family, as the smallest unit of society, is the most suitable cell for people to discover all forms of traditions and, at the same time, to learn the various rules of our social life. Therefore, I believe there is a pressing need for recognizing the irreplaceable role of the family and making every effort to restore its honour, for the sake of mankind and future generations. Being a mother as well as the wife of the President of the Republic of Hungary, I hope that with my humble charity activities I can contribute to the revival of the family in Hungary. I wish the General Assembly all the best in its work and success in its noble efforts."

The President *(interpretation from French)*: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Aleksander Luczak, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education of Poland.

Mr. Luczak (Poland): I am honoured to address this Assembly of representatives of States from all over the world.

It is a matter of special satisfaction to me that it was Poland that first came up with the initiative to proclaim an International Year of the Family, following its earlier proposal to draw up a Convention on the Rights of the Child. In proposing that the United Nations proclaim an International Year of the Family, we were guided by the belief that the family has always played an essential role in the lives of individuals and society alike. It fulfils extremely important functions, both economic and educational. It enables people to express themselves in everyday life and stimulates positive emotions.

Indeed, the family constitutes a universal social unit which closely integrates the interests of the individual and the public. Basically, it performs a similar role in all countries, regardless of social and economic systems, religious beliefs or social and regional circumstances. The leading moral, political and religious authorities have been turning to the family as the most durable asset and primary hope for the future, for the family is the first and irreplaceable educator, the basis for the transmission of the values system and inter-generational experience.

The people of Poland have always cherished family life. The Polish family has preserved national culture and transmitted its values to the young generations, even though by the eighteenth century the country had disappeared from the world political map. The family played a distinctive role in maintaining national identity.

The fundamental political, social and economic transformations in today's world have a bearing of their own on the functioning of families. As a result, the priorities of social and individual values are changing, as are the norms, patterns and models of life. Yet nothing can replace the family in its educational and social functions. Therefore, it is of singular importance to draw the attention of the international community to the need for a comprehensive approach to the family in order to ensure the family's development and provide it with satisfactory living conditions and protection.

To some extent these issues were tackled by the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna last year. The same issues are also being pursued by various international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Documents produced by these forums, including the Final Document of the recent Cairo Conference on Population and Development, the Maastricht Treaty's provisions regarding social policies and the papal proposal for a charter of the rights of the family, to mention but a few, tend to define a universal family policy. Efforts are being made to formulate a universal declaration on the rights of the family that could be adopted by the General Assembly. This is surely a challenge, in view of the different family-life traditions in various countries. I hope, none the less, that obstacles to such a declaration will be surmounted.

Systemic changes under way in Poland, including the advanced stage of transition to a market economy, necessitate the prompt elaboration of a new concept of social policies, particularly with respect to families. It is important that such efforts be woven into a coherent system covering legal regulations, financial and in-kind subsidies and services offered by public institutions.

During the ongoing transformations in Poland, a host of negative phenomena affect families: falling standards of living; rising unemployment; and emigration or job-seeking abroad. Credit facilities for housing are scarce and expensive. Companies have drastically reduced the scope of social benefits. Consequently, the economic and social security of many families has diminished. It is incumbent upon the Government to cushion the negative side-effects of transition - without altering the essential direction of reform.

During the International Year of the Family the Government of Poland has taken specific actions in favour of the family:

The 1994-1997 Programme of Socio-Economic Policies contains a comprehensive pro-family package. Some of its measures have already been set in motion.

Reform of the social security system is subject to intensive analysis.

Tax privileges have been introduced to favour married couples and single parents.

An improved mother-and-child and young people's health- care programme is being implemented.

A system of family doctors is planned.

Family-friendly hospitals are being created.

A debt-reduction programme in respect of public schools taken over by local councils, subsidized from the State budget, is in operation.

The State budget covers arrears of interest for housing credits owed to banks.

Many ad hoc steps have been taken to help children with disabilities and to help young people.

We are aware that all this is far from sufficient. Unfortunately, the country's present economic situation does not permit us to do more, nor can we afford to increase our budget deficit.

The United Nations did well to focus on the family in 1994. The family has become the subject of wide-ranging, active and constructive international collaboration. Support for the family is a fundamental social responsibility for every Member State, whatever its social and political systems and no matter what differences exist in terms of religion or customs. Let me take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family and his staff for discharging their responsibilities in successfully preparing for this important event.

Many activities directly related to the International Year of the Family have been launched in Poland. Last April we hosted in Warsaw the XVIII International Congress of Families, organized in close cooperation with the World Organization for the Family, with broad support from the Catholic Church in Poland.

Smaller-scale events have also taken place, including a conference organized by the Polish Consumers Federation. Further symposia and conferences on the family are planned.

The National Committee for the Year of the Family is active in Poland. It was set up on the initiative of the Polish Parliament and is headed by the Speaker of its lower Chamber. One of the Committee's top priorities was, in accordance with United Nations guidelines, to initiate national and local actions to alleviate the hardships of everyday life of families and assist the resolution of conflicts within the family.

The Committee succeeded in organizing summer holidays for a large number of children from low-income families and for children requiring special care. On its initiative, a number of local committees were formed in the provinces. Together with other nongovernmental organizations, those committees launched social welfare activities and the counselling of women and set up clubs and care centres for children, the elderly and young people from low-income families and from families at risk.

The observance of the International Year of the Family in my country will thus contribute to the elaboration by the Government and non-governmental organizations of various forms of assistance to the family and its members in this difficult period of systemic transformations. To this end, the Polish National Committee has outlined as its long-term objectives and following up to the International Year: elaborating a national programme of action in favour of the family, women and the younger generation; making necessary amendments to laws and regulations so as to improve the condition of family life and the well-being of the younger generation; introducing national and local measures to ease the hardships of everyday life of families; interesting the media in family issues; promoting such values as mutual respect, tolerance, solidarity and responsibility within the family; persuading researchers to take up the subjects of the modern family and its perspectives; organizing conferences on the role and function of the family under present conditions of social development; and increasing cooperation with national and international organizations on family-related issues.

We are determined to continue working together towards the multifaceted development of the family, taking advantage of such forthcoming international occasions as the World Summit for Social Development, to be held in Copenhagen next spring, or the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held next autumn in Beijing.

When the International Year is over concern for the welfare, stability and sustained development of the family should continue to be at the centre of the attention of the international community, the United Nations system, and regional and non-governmental organizations. My Government fully supports extension of the efforts to attain the noble goals of the International Year of the Family and shares the lasting commitment of the United Nations to the family.

The President *(interpretation from French)*: I now call on the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Soares (Portugal): It is a great honour for me to address the International Conference on Families on behalf of my country and to have this opportunity to express views on such crucial issues as those relating to the International Year of the Family.

The Parliamentary State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Families and Senior Citizens of Germany has already addressed the Conference on behalf of the 12 States of the European Union, expressing positions that Portugal fully subscribes to. Nevertheless, I would like to convey some reflections relating to matters of great interest to my country.

When 1994 was proclaimed the International Year of the Family, the General Assembly reiterated that the United Nations had acknowledged that families were the basic units of social life. In the same vein, the major United Nations instruments on human rights and social policy call for the widest possible protection to be accorded to the family.

In my country the family occupies a key position in the political and social system. We believe that the family is an essential element in achieving the cohesion of the social fabric. It is within the family that individuals can begin to develop their personalities to fulfil themselves as human beings, and it is within families that the different generations can find better opportunities to come together and interact.

These concerns found a place in the Portuguese Constitution, which states that the family, as a fundamental unit of society, is entitled to the protection of society and the State and to the creation of all the conditions necessary for the personal realization of its members.

The family as a source of moral values is an age-old reality for us, one that has stood the test of time and resisted the challenge of fashion and circumstance. The Portuguese policy on the family takes into account modernity and progress and is inspired by the development and improvement in material living conditions, but it remains deeply committed to the humanistic values of a people and nation with many centuries of history.

The International Year of the Family was therefore, from the Portuguese point of view, a most welcome initiative, and Portugal has participated wholeheartedly in its observance. I should like to recall that we established a Commission for the International Year of the Family, presided over by the Prime Minister. Among other activities, the Commission undertook a programme to heighten public awareness of the theme "Family, a value to be promoted". The Commission carried out its work in close cooperation with local and regional authorities, schools, churches and non-governmental organizations, in order to achieve the goal of creating, among policy makers and the public at large, greater awareness of the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society.

I should also like to avail myself of this opportunity to thank the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family, Mr. Henryk Sokalski, for the support he gave us and to congratulate him and his collaborators for the excellent work that has been done so far.

The International Year of the Family should constitute the starting-point of a long-term process. Its follow-up deserves special attention. We must ensure that the ideas and recommendations that were put forward will materialize in concrete actions.

Next year two important world conferences will take place - the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing - in which issues related to the family will be at the centre of the debates. In this context, I should like to underline our main concerns on family policies.

Our basic aim will be to promote the widest possible protection and assistance to the family as the basic unit of society, so that it may fully assume its responsibilities within the community, and at the same time to ensure the promotion of equal and full enjoyment of the human rights of all family members, with special emphasis on the equal rights, responsibilities and participation of women.

As has frequently been said on other occasions, the family, as the natural and fundamental group unit of society, is the fullest reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of a community. As such, the family is the ideal framework for an integrated and comprehensive approach to social policies. The promotion of a strong and dynamic family is an important element in the construction of an equally strong, democratic and dynamic society.

In conclusion, allow me to express the hope that the work of the International Year of the Family will

contribute to the fulfilment of one of the themes of the United Nations - to build the smallest democracy in the heart of society.

The President *(interpretation from French):* The next speaker is the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, of the Republic of Guyana, Ms. Claudette Moore, upon whom I now call.

Ms. Moore (Guyana): It is indeed a great honour for me to address this meeting on a matter of considerable importance to my country and to the international community of nations. I bring with me the hope that this debate will assist in the furtherance of our work in the International Year of the Family, and particularly in the elaboration of an international plan of action.

The situation of the family is precious in Guyana, a land of six peoples who nevertheless have one destiny, for we subscribe to the dictum that a nation is as strong as its families. In fact, the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, in addressing a rally to usher in the International Year of the Family in January 1994, made the point that:

> "The family is obviously the nucleus of all social, economic and political aspects of life, bound together by blood, unity of purpose and, most of all, tradition. And this family nucleus influences future generations."

The United Nations declaration of 1994 as the International Year of the Family was timely and afforded us, not only the opportunity to refocus on the importance of the family, but to formulate a national plan of action which could take us beyond the end of 1994 and into the twenty-first century.

In this connection a National Coordinating Committee was established in November 1993 to give effect to those efforts. The objectives of the National Committee were, first, an increased awareness of family issues at the level of government as well as in the private sector; secondly, the stimulation of efforts to respond to problems affecting and affected by the situation of families; an improvement in the collaboration among national and non-governmental organizations in support of multisectoral activities and, lastly, building upon the results of international activities concerning women, youth, the aged and the disabled.

Given the broad objectives and the seriousness attached to each objective, it was found desirable to establish subcommittees under the following headings: moral and legal, the disabled, youth, and the work environment. Members of the subcommittees were drawn from government agencies and from non-governmental organizations.

However, we did not leave the matter there, for it was recognized that the public must be sensitized. Hence, the Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, whose Ministry was designated as the focal point, delivered a New Year's message outlining the theme, objectives and programme for the Year. He also expressed the hope that the activities would

> "leave a lasting impression upon our minds and permanently guide our actions related to the uplifting of the family and our nation".

Immediately following this announcement, non-governmental organizations, and in particularly the Church, initiated a launching ceremony at which the main speaker was His Excellency Dr. Cheddie Jagan, the President of Guyana. Programmes of awareness extended through March 1994 and involved government officials as well as Guyanese families.

I shall now focus on the more serious work of the subcommittees that I identified earlier.

The Moral and Legal Sub-Committee has produced a draft family code. This was disseminated across the nation on 15 May 1994, which was observed as the International Day of Families. Work will continue with a view to incorporating all the views and issues that should be contained in such a code. This Sub-Committee has also begun to work on proposals for the establishment of a family court, with some input from senior legal professionals.

The Sub-Committee for the Disabled will shortly execute plans that have been made for what is called Disability Awareness Month, which will commence on 4 November 1994 and will culminate, on 3 December, in observance of the International Day of the Disabled.

The activities that are planned will focus on the mentally retarded, the physically handicapped, the visually handicapped, and the deaf and blind. The Ministry of Health, as Guyana's lead Ministry on disability, is in the process of reorganizing and expanding the National Rehabilitation Committee as a National

Commission on Disability, one of whose first tasks will be the formulation of a national disability policy.

Guyana can be described as a young country as 40 per cent, or more, of its population are below 35 years of age. Programmes to demonstrate the importance of youth and the complementary nature of family members in the development of literacy skills, civic consciousness, moral education and family values were undertaken in collaboration with the Commonwealth Youth Programme as part of our observances.

This approach, involving the training and guidance of semi-literate people by literate members of society, was intended to emphasize the position and status of the family as a key social institution, to reinforce family ties and to have a multiplier effect on the rest of society.

Consistent with its commitment to youth, the Government submitted a paper on national youth policy in June 1994. It is intended that the mechanisms established will provide young people with scope for self-expression and will make provision for appropriate programme development.

The efforts of the Work Environment Committee, on the other hand, are geared to securing the involvement of the private sector and social-service institutions to assist in improving working conditions for people with family responsibilities. We have set as the major focus the achievement of the International Labour Organization's aim of ratification of Convention 156 during this year or shortly thereafter. In August 1994 a national workshop was held, with representatives of government, trade unions, employers and non-governmental organizations participating. It is noteworthy that, as a consequence, Guyana has fulfilled all preliminary legal requirements for ratification of this Convention.

Conventions 100, 111 and 142 having been ratified, the Constitution of Guyana provides every citizen with the right to work and to free selection in accordance with social requirements and personal qualifications. It also provides for men and women to enjoy equal rights and the same legal status in all spheres of economic life. In addition, the Equal Rights Act 1990 removes all forms of discrimination based on sex and provides for equal opportunities for men and women. The work of this Committee is therefore concentrated on the establishment of the social infrastructure that is necessary to alleviating the burden of family responsibilities on the productivity of workers.

The establishment of adequate care facilities for children in and out of school, elderly people and other family members is currently being examined. As an extension of our work in this area, Guyana will join other countries in the Caribbean in a regional workshop later in the year. It is hoped that efforts will then be combined to develop strategies for implementation of the Convention at the regional level.

Guyana has signalled its commitment to "the emergence of a global humanitarian order" in which international development and cooperation will focus on the welfare of people. The circumstances of people who comprise a family unit are many and varied. Nevertheless, if given the necessary resources and support through appropriate legislation and policy, families could play a major role in advancing development.

Changes in the structure and composition of families have been almost universal, but important socio-economic and cultural functions performed by families should be preserved and transmitted to succeeding generations. Guyana will therefore seek to ensure that a plan of action is informed by the deliberations and activities of the International Year of the Family, with goals peculiar to our local situation but consistent with the universality of the human family.

The President *(interpretation from French):* The meeting began at 10.10 a.m., yet only eight out of 184 delegations have representatives in the Hall. The eight delegations, which include those of the first three speakers in the debate, are those of Egypt, Germany, Hungary, India, Poland, Portugal, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America.

I now call on Ms. Mercedes Pulido Briceño, Minister for the Family of Venezuela.

Mrs. Pulido de Briceño (Venezuela) *(interpretation from Spanish):* The Government of Venezuela attaches particular importance to the discussion of social matters. When we speak of social matters we necessarily look to the major agent in the building of society, which is, of course, the family.

The International Year of the Family, as one of the major political and economic events that have affected our lives, has been a focus for action and for recognition of the fact that the aspirations of society go beyond the

obvious, beyond the mere meeting of basic needs, and seek fulfilment in people's hopes and values.

Venezuela has welcomed large waves of immigrants. In the framework of a mixture of races, we have a society characterized by egalitarian values. In our society the family has been the meeting place between the aspiration to equality on the one hand and, on the other, the need to make up for many deficiencies. Cultures meet in the family, and social mobilization is part of that reality.

We are aware that there may be discrimination, but above and beyond this we have a society which is hard to classify socially. The many years of extolling individualism have not undermined our families. Their daily lives are marked by friendship, interaction and solidarity. We are grateful for this opportunity, at such a difficult time, to focus our attention on the family, to discover all the ways in which it is organized, as a flexible and clear response to the need to adapt to new times. The realities of shortages and changes in family life in our society demonstrate that decisions based solely on the quest for material and technological progress are outdated. Now more than ever we must address the cultural values and aspirations that give meaning to our lives as we face the future.

How can coexistence be achieved without strengthening people, the basis of the entire life cycle. The institution of the family is the basic cell, because that is where we are born, where we live and where we die. Until recently, the family was a purely private setting; we were indifferent to it; we did not want to get involved in the discussions that were part of everyday life. We wanted to devote ourselves only to ensuring the normalcy of the collectivity. However, the fact is that today family violence, crime, drugs, abuse and slavery are part of family relations. They are part of our families' daily lives, based on traditional habits and values that will determine our future.

How can we envisage democracy if the family does not understand the need to strengthen democratic links from the very moment we come into the world? Can we claim to be able to face the future without identifying the right kinds of social relationships, limiting ourselves to satisfying basic, partial needs? Poverty is not simply a matter of social indicators. It is a culture of survival, in which humans wear themselves out day after day trying to look beyond the next 24 hours. In this world, there is not time to develop options or opportunities or aspirations to build social relations that go beyond the immediate.

Responsible parenthood, which is a reality in our region, is not simply a matter of will. Among our young people today, 30 per cent are excluded from the school system, while 20 per cent leave the school system for a life of poverty. One cannot be a responsible parent if one does not have the ability to produce the income that is necessary to provide for the needs of a household, if society has not redefined the role of men vis-a-vis the advancement of the status of women, if poverty means a lack of prospects for the future. How can one assume responsibility without taking all those factors into account?

The International Year of the Family has involved opening up new channels for discussion in Venezuelan society. The disabled; children with special problems; the elderly - who have been ignored up to now; street children; working children; those bound by slavery, to a certain point, in the rural areas; mothers who themselves are only children; what we call the feminization of poverty: these are all factors which cannot be dealt with in isolation.

Thirty-eight percent of our population - 580,000 families - lives in a state of critical poverty. Many of them are products of migration. Our country, in this context, is a symbol of prospects for the future. We are not yet able to deny this opportunity to other peoples, but we must also face our inability to find our own identity. Social problems associated with poverty result in a lack of participation in society. Our challenge is not just to develop social-integration policies; we must aim for a model of development which will make it possible to include major sectors of society, with their own particular and very real circumstances, and change the nature of current participation so as to develop an overall vision.

What has been the strategy of our country? Three major problems have been the focus of our attention. First, there are the children under six years of age. Here, in addition to health, nutrition and education indicators, we have seen a great expansion in household-centred programmes and day-care programmes, in which the working mother, is given the option of being incorporated into civil society through other channels that enable them to do more than just meet basic needs, channels for participation in local decision-making, channels for participation in the decentralization of the country.

The second major problem is the eight- to sixteen-year-old category. We have not forgotten the adolescents. We are talking, really, about children under six and about 18-year-olds. This is our major social challenge. That is why we have a wide-ranging programme - like our Ayacucho Fund - that uses oil income for the training of human resources in higher education. We have allocated 4 billion bolivars for training our citizens, for integrating our young people from 8 to 16 years old into the labour market.

The diversification of the local economy could be an option for the future, but at the present time, our local, informal economy, without technology or social security, does very little to incorporate our young people. I should like to take this opportunity to outline the major options involved in our definition of family policy.

Mrs. Burmester de Maynard (Uruguay), took the Chair.

Public policies, focused solely on caring for vulnerable sectors of the population, are merely a segment of the concept of integration. Family policies should regard the family as a component of the social, political and economic elements.

I wish to make another point that I find interesting. While it is very tempting to focus on the most vulnerable, we also need to develop élite groups that have the ability to shape and direct that sector. If the State is to have an authoritarian and centralizing role, it must involve all the groups of civil society, not simply as interlocutors of the State, but as interlocutors of a society which is also capable of diversification.

There are two aspects to the readjustment of family policies. First, we believe that assistance policies are needed. When we have such large sectors that are poor, we cannot expect them to have the strength to make the journey by themselves. It has often been said that we should not give the people fish, but should teach them how to fish. But we wonder if it is not also necessary to give them the strength to hold the fishing-rod.

The second aspect relates to social-investment policies in which the conditions are established for the family to play its socializing role. We cannot blame families for not playing that role if we take away from them the tools for change. Why do we take the family into account nowadays? Because technological and material progress have failed to respond to our needs for development as human beings. If, as has been stated in the context of the social summit, we really want to design participative policies, then family policies must provide for relations of interdependence; of globalization of the problems of society; of reinterpretation of the values of equity, solidarity and civil responsibility. The collectivity must be rebuilt as an expression of all human beings. Only in this way can we say that we are really caring for our people.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish):* I now call on the representative of China, Mr. Wang Xuexian.

Mr. Wang Xuexian (China) *(interpretation from Chinese):* The United Nations is a big international family composed of 184 Member States. It is therefore not only appropriate but also very important for this big family to devote these meetings of the General Assembly to a commemoration of the International Year of the Family. This in itself shows that the question of the family has become an issue of greater significance to the international community as well as an important item on the agenda of the United Nations.

On behalf of the Chinese Government, I wish warmly to welcome the convening of these meetings. We deeply appreciate the fruitful work carried out by the Secretariat of the United Nations, the regional preparatory meetings and, in particular, Mr. Sakolski, Coordinator for the International Year of the Family.

Since the adoption by the General Assembly at its forty-fourth session of the resolution which proclaimed 1994 the International Year of the Family, countries in all parts of the world have made positive responses. Centring on the year's theme of "Family Harmony and Progress", national Governments and the international community as a whole have all worked enthusiastically in the wide-ranging preparations for the Year. These activities have helped draw people's attention to the question of family, deepened their understanding of various economic, social and population elements of the issue of family, enhanced the various countries' efforts in formulating or adjusting their family policies and programmes, and promoted international cooperation in the sphere of the family.

It has always been an important part of the Chinese culture to attach importance to families and their values. This tradition has been enhanced by the development of family relations towards equality, democracy and harmony. We the Chinese have always taken pride in

our happy and harmonious families. China now has more than 260 million families; they constitute the structure of China's modern society, abounding with unprecedented vitality. The healthy build-up of these families, which enables people to live in harmony and friendship, is conducive to the stability and development of the entire society. The Chinese Government has responded actively to the International Year of the Family and carried out a series of instructive activities, including some of the following events.

In May last year, China had the honour to invite representatives or observers from 26 countries and regions and 17 United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to participate in the Asia and Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family, held in Beijing. The meeting was highly successful, and the Beijing Declaration it adopted was viewed with favour by all sides.

In February 1993, the Chinese Government set up its own Coordinating Committee composed of representatives of a dozen Government departments and organizations. Over the past year China has carried out many diverse activities, organized and guided by its national Committee.

On 15 May this year, Beijing celebrated the International Day of the Family. Many specialists, scholars and governmental officials participated in the activities, going into the main streets and outdoor public places to explain and give advice and answer questions on China's family law and to share their specific legal and scientific knowledge.

On the same day, the award ceremony for the Model Family was held. Before the ceremony, there were nation-wide activities in connection with the choice of the model family. Thirty families won gold, silver and other honourary awards. They are all families that have made significant contributions to society and enjoy family harmony and rich family life, thus winning great respect.

Special television programmes on the family, including performances by individual families, have been shown. Similar performances have also been telecast at the grass-roots level in both urban and rural areas.

Seminars on family culture have been conducted for an exchange of views and useful experiences and to put forward recommendations for future work.

The International Symposium on the Family and the Next Generation was held to discuss the building of family culture and youth education.

These activities are very popular among the Chinese people and have helped deepen people's affection for their families.

It is well known that the family is the natural and basic unit of society and plays a very important role in social development. The family is both the beneficiary of and the active participant in social development. Without happy and harmonious families, it is impossible to maintain a happy and harmonious society. We therefore believe that it is essential for the activities of the International Year of the Family to continue in the interest of individual families as well as all mankind. The Chinese Government and people are willing to work with other members of the international community and to make their due contribution to collective efforts.

Finally, we wish to express our sincere hope that all families in the world will have a life full of sunshine and love, that every child in the world will grow up loved and cared for, that all the elderly will be well provided for and live in comfort, that all families in the world will enjoy harmony and progress, and that society will enjoy peace and development.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I call on the Permanent Representative of Paraguay, Mr. José Félix Fernández Estigarribia.

Mr. Fernandez Estigarribia (Paraguay) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States at this meeting on the International Year of the Family.

This commemoration is particularly timely, now that the subject of the family has been reinstated on our agendas. If we look at the Constitutions of all the countries in our Group, we find that, for the most part, they explicitly guarantee the rights of the family. Furthermore, none of us can turn our back on the

important debate that the family is deeply engaged in today. Although we accept the family's historical values, it is at present in a state of flux because of the staggering changes that have taken place in world society.

When we speak about change in our societies and its influence on the issue now before us, it cannot escape us that the family is at the same time and from another standpoint a powerful renovating agent. It is in the family that generally accepted knowledge is reassessed and subtly added to and changed, without losing sight of the essential values of our common civilization.

For this reason strengthening our democracies also involves intensifying the debate on the role of the family because of its influence as a first educator of free and egalitarian consciences.

This of course is a long-standing concern of the United Nations. To prove that assertion, we need only glance again at the remarkable Convention on the Rights of the Child, one of the most broadly ratified instruments.

For that reason we cannot fail to mention the momentous conclusions of the regional preparatory meeting which took place in Cartagena, Colombia, from 10 to 14 August, and which reflect the aspirations of the region. In this vein, and only by way of reference in view of the importance of each and every one of its results, we should like to refer to the way in which the text addresses the question of variables in the composition of the family and the widespread concern about how poverty affects the family structure.

We should bear in mind that families, particularly those living in marginal urban and rural areas, are involved in new forms of survival, including in many cases, self-managing organizations which permit them in solidarity to tackle the economic crisis while playing a leading role in the process of change in society.

With regard to social commitment, despite the difficult economic situation, and notwithstanding the scarcity of resources, Governments in many of our countries have striven to focus their attention on families beset by the problems of poverty, particularly those in extreme poverty, in the form of social support programmes designed to improve their living conditions.

The basis for the recovery of the family, which is needed for greater promotion of human rights, equality between the sexes, individual freedoms and greater emphasis on the rights of the child, will be determined by the extent of international cooperation and governmental concern.

In this respect we should like to bring forward a new point of concern about the scope of the family. In the last decade of the twentieth century there have been two major trends - the ageing of the population and the development of family structures. These trends may be regarded as different aspects of modernization and call for a substantive response from Governments and from various members of the family.

As a result there is a need to broaden our knowledge about the way in which changes in family and household structures are associated with changes in the age structure of the population. In particular, we need a better understanding of the way in which the proportion of elderly people has grown as a result of the influences and effects that stem from economic and social change and at the same time the influence that growth has had on those changes.

Previously it was believed that the ageing of the population was a phenomenon that was particularly characteristic of the developed countries. However, United Nations forecasts indicate that the ageing of the population most strikingly affects the developing world, as shown by the following statistics.

In a study carried out by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean it was estimated that in 1980 there were more than 23 million people aged over 60 in Latin America. A total of 40 million is forecast for the year 2000, and 93 million for the year 2025. At the same time, life expectancy at birth will rise in Latin America from 51.2 years for the period 1950-1955 to 71.8 years for the period 2020-2025. This indicates that this region cannot be considered a "young region", as there is an accelerated demographic transition taking place towards lower birth and mortality rates.

We trust that in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen major steps forward will be taken in the process of consolidating the family structure.

For these reasons, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and on behalf of my country I should like to reaffirm our unswerving commitment to strengthening our efforts in order to give reality to the principle that every person has the right to form a family and that in the formation and development of that family men and women have the same rights and duties.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now call on Ms. Ruth Wijdenbosch, Chairperson of the National Committee for the Year of the Family of Suriname.

Ms. Wijdenbosch (Suriname): The proclamation by the United Nations of the International Year of the Family has offered all Governments and non-governmental organizations the opportunity to highlight the importance of the family, increase awareness of family issues, strengthen national efforts to respond to problems affecting the family and create greater understanding of societies for the specific difficulties the family is facing in our rapidly changing world.

The preparatory meetings at regional and international level, combined with the facilitating activities of the secretariat of the International Year of the Family, have produced many valuable proposals which have guided national committees in formulating their national programmes. The challenge of formulating national programmes to support the family has been fully taken up by most States Members of the United Nations and the reports presented on the implementation of the programmes are strong testimony to the success of this undertaking.

We firmly believe that to guarantee a more successful implementation of these programmes, a framework of conditions should be met in order to create opportunities for development, to affirm an improvement in standards of living, and a higher quality of life for the family.

The International Year of the Family has provided us with a unique opportunity to give human development in all its aspects the high priority it deserves in the context of the recently held International Conference on Population and Development and the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development, and Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing. These meetings give the international community the opportunity adequately to address the problems of poverty, unemployment, disintegration and disease and how they affect the family. Taking the aforementioned into consideration, we are happy to note that there is a general understanding among the members of the international community on the relationship between conditions for development and the well-being of the family.

The interrelationship between the position of the family, sustained economic growth and sustainable development has been the leading approach in the formulation and implementation of the national programme of Suriname. This is reflected in the theme chosen for the International Year of the Family by the national committee, namely, "The Family in Changing Socio-economic Circumstances".

The Suriname National Committee, which was established in June 1993 by the Minister for Social Affairs and Housing, attributes high priority to the social and human dimensions of development. We are aware of the fact that, by placing the human being in the centre, a vital contribution can be made towards our common goal of achieving sustainable human development. Therefore we support the integration of programmes to promote the development of the family into overall social and economic development planning. The concept that social and family issues are a secondary matter in contrast with the primary process taking place in the political forums, is a serious mistake.

The history of Suriname and the multi-ethnic composition of its population have resulted in a variety of family structures. Therefore, the Government has given due consideration to the specific social, economic and cultural priorities and needs of the various family types and their individual members. In Suriname we distinguish the following family structures: the nuclear family, a two-generation family which can be seen in our society in many variations such as the two-parent family, the step-family and the adoption family; the extended

family, the most common variations of which are the two- and three-generation families; the reorganized family; and the single-parent family.

Please allow me briefly to explain the difficulties the single-parent family is confronted with in my country. The single-parent family, in most cases with a woman at its head, can be found in the capital as well as in the rural areas. In Suriname, 25 per cent of the working women are also head of the family, and the number is increasing as a result of the economic crisis my country is going through. Studies have shown that the majority of these women have a low education level and, therefore, exercise the lowest paid professions. At the same time, they suffer the most from the economic crisis, which compels them to use survival strategies, such as looking for additional income, adjusting the expenditure of their income by saving on food and other basic needs, and by involving their children in income-generating activities to increase the family income.

The Government of Suriname is fully aware of the situation of this specific group and has therefore committed itself, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, to give special attention and assistance to needy single-parent families through ensuring credit and funding for women's self-help groups. Furthermore, the Government also guarantees elementary services in the fields of health, education and housing for this vulnerable group.

Let me now turn briefly to the activities carried out by the Suriname National Committee. The Committee, which is chaired by the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname, consists of 14 representatives of ministries and religious and non-governmental organizations. The Government of Suriname fully supports the Committee and underlines the importance of the role of the family in our society. The Suriname Committee has decided that its role is not to implement a programme of activities or launch a set of new initiatives on its own, but rather to increase awareness of family issues all over the country and to encourage organizations to respond to the problems and needs of the family, and to offer technical and financial support to do so.

In this respect, the Committee, at the beginning of the year, brought together a variety of organizations active in the field of strengthening the role of the family, which identified 28 projects in the areas of health care, food production, education, youth, the advancement of women, and research and data collection. Some of these projects have already been implemented, while some will be executed in 1995. The United Nations Children's Fund selected and is in the process of financing three of these projects: the recruitment of foster families, a health project in a number of Amerindian villages and a school garden project which teaches children how to till the land. Other projects were financed by several local funding agencies, the private sector and the Government.

The Suriname Committee is of the view that the issues of gender equity, equality and the empowerment of women constitute the basic pillars of the family programmes and that they can facilitate the efforts to achieve the common goal of sustainable development. For this reason, the role of women in the national programme for the family has been underlined.

We are committed to the process of integrating the programme of action for the family in our national development programme, taking into account the strong links between the well-being of the family and sustainable development. In this regard, the Committee is in the process of preparing a recommendation to the Government to establish a national institute for the family, which will act as a coordinating body for all present and future policies and activities of governmental and non-governmental organizations involved with issues regarding the family and development. We are of the firm belief that this activity in the sphere of institutional strengthening, when combined with activities in the field of research and data collection, and with the necessary international support of organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Development Programme, will have a positive impact on the Surinamese family.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Organization for the praiseworthy initiative of organizing this Conference, thus enabling national committees to exchange experiences and discuss follow-up activities on

an issue of such great importance for all our countries and peoples.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I call next on the representative of the Russian Federation, Her Excellency Mrs. Ludmilla Bezlepkina, Minister for Social Protection.

Mrs. Bezlepkina (Russian Federation) *(interpretation from Russian)*: I am greatly honoured to address the Assembly on the question of the family. The Russian Federation is a strong supporter of the ideals and principles of the International Year of the Family; we base our family policy on the permanent and unchanging value of the family for the life and development of the individual and on its importance to society in terms of raising new generations, achieving social stability and progress, and supporting social peace and harmony.

On that basis, the Russian Federation attaches great importance to this question, which the General Assembly is rightly discussing. We greatly appreciate the efforts of United Nations experts in carrying out the activities of the International Year of the Family. We convey special thanks to Mr. Henryk Sakolski, whose participation in the work of the International Scientific and Practical Conference on the Family and the Development Process, held at Moscow in November 1993, enhanced the importance of that Conference. The report of the Conference was published in an edition of 1,500 copies and has been useful to a large number of scientists and practical workers.

I believe that today it is not all that important to take stock of what has been done this year, the International Year of the Family. Russia has submitted to today's Conference on the question of the family a brief report entitled "Policy Relating to the Family and the Holding of the International Year of the Family in the Russian Federation". Those wishing to do so are welcome to familiarize themselves with it. We will be able to discuss the results of the International Year of the Family at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly. I can state with full confidence that the activities carried out at the federal level and also at the regional and local levels met with broad support and approval on the part of both the local authorities and the population, and helped to achieve social peace and harmony even in the very complex and contradictory times of this transitional period in the social and economic development of Russia.

Today I should like to draw attention to world-wide trends whose emergence at the national level is causing great concern. I refer to the reduction in the level at which the family, as a social institution, can provide its members with social and physical security. The factors at work here are the growth of poverty, violence, the number of orphans, loneliness, drug addiction, prostitution and alcoholism. These are all characteristics of our times. Above all, we should be concerned about protecting the interests and the rights of children, who are totally dependent on the decisions and actions of adults; but their future will depend on what those decisions and actions are.

The interests of the family are not taken into account in determining the processes of historical development. As a consequence, families frequently do not manage to adapt to social changes. Society as a whole pays a very high social price for this. Have we really been creating and are we still creating systems and structural institutions that are equal to the continuing processes of industrialization, urbanization, the emancipation of women and the shift of productive activity outside the family structures that create and promote conditions for the family to carry out its main functions? The family, as a fundamental intermediary between the individual, the State and other social institutions, is not being given by senior officials and management organs its proper role, and sometimes the interests of the family are simply ignored.

The next point is that the interests of the family are not taken into account in the determination of the interrelationship between employer and employee. The latter is frequently considered as a work resource, but not as a worker with family obligations. If we correlate this to the objective reality which is characteristic of Russia and, indeed, for many other countries, where both parents in the family are working, this on the one hand is progressive from the point of view of equal opportunity for men and women, but it also requires the adoption of an appropriate policy regarding the responsibility of both parents in bringing up the children and caring for the sick and the elderly, a policy of

equalizing intra-family relations. The State, for its part, must actively help to develop a system of social services and their provision and assure the right and opportunity for their use, as well as the corresponding regimes and guarantees of employment.

Only through such an approach can we talk about real ways of achieving the rights and freedoms of the individual on the principle of the elimination of all forms of discrimination, particularly discrimination against women. Only such an approach can ensure greater participation and the corresponding greater responsibility of women, involving them in the management of resources and in taking decisions at all social levels.

Today we cannot but see the need for a high level of coordination in the role of the United Nations and effective action at the interregional level, particularly for the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Recognizing the high degree of importance of social law as a basis for achieving economic and political cooperation for sustainable development, I feel it necessary and important to strengthen the role of cooperation at the regional level, in this case, the role of the Economic Commission for Europe.

On the basis of the above, and given the importance of the efforts and initiatives of the United Nations and UNICEF in the interests of our children, and of forthcoming events in the area of social policy - the World Summit for Social Development, to be held in March 1995, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995 - I am proposing that we declare the period 1995-2005 the Decade of the Family. I propose that we work out a plan of action for this decade that takes into account the reality of achieving evolutionary development and progress, and that defines measures and standards for protecting the fundamental functions of the family and their development and adaptation to the new realities and challenges of life.

The experience of the past decade in improving the status of women and the disabled confirms the rightness of such an approach. Our common efforts at the international and national levels will help us move into the twenty-first century on the basis of the principles of real priority interests of the individual and spiritual and moral development which to a great extent, is assisted by the family. This is a phenomenon of the progress of the evolutionary development of society and of the individual, who is able to react to the challenges of life on the strength of the principles and ethics of his or her lofty human potential. Achieving this must be the goal of the further historical development of the family's economic, political and social transformations.

Allow me to wish all the participants in the General Assembly every success in achieving these noble goals.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish):* I now call on His Excellency Mr. Pawan Kumar Bansal, Member of Parliament of India.

Mr. Pawan Kumar Bansal (India): It is most appropriate that we should be celebrating the International Year of the Family this year and addressing related issues in the General Assembly. The International Conference on Population and Development, held recently in Cairo, provides the backdrop for our deliberations.

India believes that the family is the basic building-block of society. Good family values have been able to contain tension, conflict, crime and violence in society, particularly in the young, and have protected to a large degree the rights and safety of children, engendered social compact and responsibility, and directly contributed to the internal peace, growth, stability and harmony of society.

It is of paramount importance that United Nations activities on human rights education should draw upon the best of successful family traditions and values from all societies and promote them around the globe in the interest of more peaceful societies, and the preservation of human rights and social values for all mankind. Individuals have not only rights in society, but responsibilities to society as well, and to the global family as a whole, as is reflected in the ancient Indian concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam", that is, the world is but a family.

India has been implementing active and holistic family-welfare strategies over several decades with positive results. This is based upon the interconnections

of literacy, economic and social development and population control. In India, the family has been the basic unit of stability and integration in a society of free choice. Indian family-welfare programmes are significantly based on voluntary participation.

The Indian Government spends about half a billion dollars annually on its family welfare programme. India's family welfare programme is funded by the central Government. In an effort to impart dynamism to our family-welfare programme, a focused and result-oriented action plan has been developed over the last few years. Some of its key features are: improving the quality and outreach of family-welfare services; developing a mechanism to make funds available to the state governments on the basis of their performance in the reduction of the birth rate; increasing the coverage of younger couples; involving voluntary and non-governmental organizations in a big way to promote active community participation; and evolving higher-level intersectoral coordination mechanisms at the national, state, district and block levels and, most important, at the village level.

India fully accepts the goal of universalizing services for sexual and reproductive health care, of meeting the unmet needs by the year 2015, as envisaged at Cairo, and of removing all programme-related barriers by 2005. We aim to implement the Cairo Programme of Action at the national level, with international cooperation as appropriate and in accordance with the United Nations Charter. However, India expressed reservations on the linking of debt relief with government investment in family and development programmes at the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, since we believe that the implementation of the recommendations of the Cairo Conference on the subject of the family and population is the sovereign right of a State, in consonance with its national laws and development priorities.

In India, we have also realized that development activities undertaken with the active participation of the beneficiaries and the community have a greater chance of success and can be more cost effective. India has benefited from the rich tradition of voluntary action from the beginning of our independence movement under Mahatma Gandhi, and today voluntary and non-governmental groups play an important and supportive role along with the Government in development activities, including those concerning the welfare of women, particularly at the grass roots.

In India, the term "weaker sections" embraces the socially and economically disadvantaged sections of our population. The Constitution of India recognizes the special needs of these specific groups and makes a number of provisions to protect and promote their interests. It is in this tradition that the constitutional provision on the directive principles of State policy has informed the policy-making of successive Governments in India in order to ensure social justice for all. The disadvantaged sections constitute about 25 per cent of the population. Their development is being pursued through some of the largest affirmative-action programmes in the world in their favour in education, employment and other areas. The Government has also involved non-governmental organizations in the promotion of the economic and social development of the weaker sections.

The disabled constitute about 1.9 per cent of our population. Today, special emphasis is placed by the Government on rehabilitation programmes for slum dwellers, comprehensive legislation for the rights of people with disabilities, and wider education of the disabled. A national programme for developing technologies for the disabled was launched in 1988. We have also set up special employment exchanges and special cells for handicapped persons all over the country.

The Integrated Rural Development Programme and the Prime Minister's New Employment Scheme support training programmes for youth towards self-employment in all Indian states. These programmes provide technical and basic managerial skills as well as loans and subsidies to youth in the age group of 18 to 35 years and to families living below the poverty line, to enable them to become self-employed.

India has registered considerable success in the functioning and development of the cooperative movement in a democratic society. This is acknowledged in the Secretary-General's report on the subject in document A/49/213. We endorse some of the

conclusions of the report: First, cooperative enterprises provide the organizational means by which a significant proportion of humanity is able to take into its own hands the tasks of creating productive employment, overcoming poverty and achieving social integration. Secondly, cooperatives contribute substantially to the common good in market economies, principally by improving the efficiency and quality of the economy, but also by assuring democratization and environmental rationality. Thirdly, an effective working partnership between Governments and cooperative movements might be an important means to allocate and mobilize societal resources effectively. Other conclusions of the report need further study.

Just as the needs of the family, youth, women and the aged are best met in a just, democratic and tolerant society, cohesive, well-knit family traditions, in turn, contribute to the building of such a society. The societies which have overlooked the importance of traditional family values in their pursuit of personal excellence and prosperity are today re-emphasizing the role of the individual within the family. In this International Year of the Family, let us reaffirm our faith in the family as the nucleus of a healthy and orderly society.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I call on the representative of Malta, Mr. Joseph Cassar.

Mr. Cassar (Malta): These Meetings of the General Assembly are significant not only because they coincide with the observance of the International Year of the Family, but also, and even more, because they reflect the importance Member States ascribe to the family.

Throughout history, the family has always been considered the basic unit of society. The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo again acknowledged and reaffirmed this fact. Malta is honoured to have contributed to the negotiations which ensured that this principle was given the attention it merits in the Conference's final document.

The family is an essential element for secure social development. It provides a source of mutual love, respect, solidarity and affection and acts as a support system for its individual members, encouraging personal growth and respect for individual rights.

The family transmits values from one generation to another and is a powerful agent for social, political and cultural evolution - a primary vehicle for development, industrialization and urbanization. The family, however, is also influenced by the nature and pace of change. It is today subject to numerous pressures that make it extremely vulnerable and thus it requires, more than ever before, the support of other institutions.

The international community's celebration of the International Year of the Family is a long-overdue acknowledgement. In preparation for this International Year of the Family, Malta had the privilege of hosting the United Nations Europe and North America Preparatory Meeting in April 1993 and the World NGO Forum in November 1993. The Valletta Declaration issued by the Europe and North America Preparatory Meeting reaffirmed a wide-ranging commitment to the family and invited the United Nations, intergovernmental organizations and Member States to encourage and support regional cooperation with respect to family matters.

Malta has noted with great interest, and supports, the recommendations of the Coordinator of the International Year of the Family calling for appropriate action to be taken with a view to including family-oriented elements in the work of the Commission on Human Rights. By safeguarding and promoting the values and unity of the family, we further strengthen the protection of human rights.

The Government of Malta believes that the State should concern itself with helping and consolidating the family. It can never be in the true interest of the State to weaken the family unit. The State should support and protect the family and facilitate its role. Such a role requires the safeguarding of human rights, ranging from the equal rights of men and women to social security; from the right to education to the right to life of the unborn child.

In giving its support, the State should not exploit the family in order to ensure a larger or smaller work force. Parents have the exclusive right to plan the size of their family in accordance with their own beliefs and convictions. Decisions of this nature should not be made

under pressure by the State through such methods as limiting the number of children eligible for State subsidies.

Since Malta's independence 30 years ago, successive Governments in Malta have worked to give tangible form to these convictions. The enactment of Act XXI of 1993 by Parliament, after weeks of public discussion, has given a new dimension to family life. The law provides for a concept of marriage based on the recognition of the fundamental principles of equality between the spouses and, necessarily, on their common consent. In marriage and within the family, husband and wife are recognized, in practice and in the eyes of the law, to be equal partners. They are jointly responsible for the care and upbringing of the children and are expected to reach agreement on all matters of importance to family life. The status of women has been enhanced through fundamental changes that give the necessary recognition to the dignity of the person - a dignity shared by all individual members of the family.

The Government of Malta believes that discrimination on the basis of gender should be eliminated in a democratic society. Women should not be discriminated against. They should have the right to decide to work outside the home and have the right to the same remuneration as their male counterparts. The acknowledgement of such rights in no way diminishes the important and significant contribution to society of women who choose to exercise their right to devote all of their time to bringing up their children and looking after the family. For such choices to be truly free, States should promote child day-care services, subsidies for full-time family workers, and retraining opportunities for women who rejoin the work force after an absence of some years.

My Government believes that the family offers the best psychological milieu for stable personality development, as well as the niche where one assimilates moral values and cherished social customs. The family offers its members the basis of a satisfactory and meaningful life. Above all, it provides solidarity to all its members, particularly those with special needs owing to disability, emotional stress or ageing. In this respect, the family, given the necessary support by Government and non-governmental organizations, is the ideal organ for enhancing the chances for persons, whatever their special needs, to remain integrated in society.

In the light of these principles, the Government of Malta strives to support the family rather than to supplant it. Social security is universal, and assistance is provided to the unemployed and to persons without any source of income. Children's and family allowances are granted by the State, and special benefits are available for the chronically ill, the disabled and other marginal groups. An allowance is given to persons who give up employment to care for a disabled or an elderly relative. Pensions for the elderly and the disabled provide adequate financial income to ensure integration. These benefits, together with universal health care, help foster solidarity and diminish that stress which persons with special needs exert on the family.

Protection and assistance help the family to fully assume its responsibility as the basic unit of society. As the natural environment for children and youth, and the most desirable support system for the elderly and the disabled, the strengthening of the family should be given priority by national Governments, intergovernmental organizations and concerned non-governmental organizations.

In recent years, the family and social change have been the subject of considerable discussion in Malta. The family has become smaller but remains strong and strategic in the social structure of our community. Its strength has helped it evolve and respond to various economic, social and psychological pressures. The Government and non-governmental organizations, in supporting the family, emphasize preventive measures such as counselling before and during marriage. In cases of marital breakdown, hostel facilities and accommodation at affordable rents are provided whenever possible. Residential facilities are available for children taken in care, but in this respect fostering is preferred to long-term institutionalization.

During the past 30 years, economic development and the increasing level of employment have been instrumental in raising the standard of living. This process has been further strengthened by free and universal access to education at all levels.

Drug abuse is a cause of concern. The welfare services, in close cooperation with the health authorities,

the police and the Catholic non-governmental organization Caritas, provide comprehensive counselling, detoxification services and programmes aimed at overcoming the problem and encouraging full integration.

In major international instruments, the United Nations and the international community have proclaimed the inalienable and fundamental human rights of persons and have repeatedly declared that the family, as the basic unit of society, is entitled to protection by society and the State. These abundant references to the family should be embodied in a coherent and comprehensive document on the functions, responsibilities and rights of the family. Such an international document on the family would have a direct impact on its members and on the role of the family in society. It would further rather than preclude the protection of the rights of the family and of its individual members.

That is why my Government believes that in the follow-up to this Year of the Family, we should harmonize our efforts to consolidate peace and democracy with efforts to promote social justice on a global scale. Families can realize their full potential only in a world where peace and freedom prevail and in a just society free from inequities. Poverty, hunger, illiteracy, racial discrimination, the degradation of the environment, armed conflict and other calamities greatly impede the normal development of the family in vast areas of the world.

Political and economic instability have uprooted millions from their homes. In a spirit of international solidarity, many States have welcomed the victims of these modern-day scourges. It is hoped that in such instances family reunification will be given the importance it deserves.

Subsidiarity is a key principle of contemporary society. Our efforts to bring decision-making close to those most affected by it should find immediate resonance in matters which have a direct impact on the family. Believing as we do that the family is the basic unit of society, we should strive to fortify its protection and support. The erosion of the family as an institution cannot but result in fissures which threaten the stability of those very societies which we cherish most.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I should like to inform the Assembly that the representative of Brazil has requested to be allowed to participate in the debate on this agenda item, although the list of speakers was closed yesterday morning.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Assembly decides to allow the name of the delegation of Brazil to be included in the list of speakers.

It was so decided.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now call on the Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan, Mr. Shunji Maruyama.

Mr. Maruyama (Japan): Before commencing my remarks, I would like to express my appreciation to Mr. Henryk J. Sokalski, Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, for his excellent work in promoting observance of the Year.

It is universally recognized that the family constitutes the basic unit of society and that it assumes diverse forms and functions which reflect the diversity of individual preferences and social conditions. It acts as a leading agent in promoting the well-being of the larger social entities that are built on it, and it thus plays a critical role in social development. Everywhere, the family provides both physical and spiritual support for its members, and particularly for those who are most vulnerable, such as children, working adults, and the aged. Our common principles and values - human dignity, equality, respect, mutual responsibility and cooperation - are first shaped and nurtured in the family.

Bearing all this in mind, the Government of Japan is in full accord with the objectives of the International Year of the Family, which provides Member States with an excellent opportunity to re-evaluate and promote the family's unique role and functions in various aspects of our life. The Year is an occasion to promote the concept of the family as the smallest working democracy, one that operates at the very heart of society.

Japan welcomes the vast array of initiatives undertaken by Member States in support of families, and,

for its part, it is carrying out a number of public-information activities in observance of the Year. Among the events organized by the Government of Japan are seminars and concerts, and the issuance of special commemorative stamps. Local governments and non-governmental organizations are also making important contributions in promoting the role and functions of the family in bringing about social progress.

These activities help the people understand the objectives of the International Year of the Family, one of which is the creation of a society of equals that gives special priorities to the needs of the vulnerable. My country attaches particular importance to promoting policies and measures that contribute to a more equal partnership between men and women and, in particular, an equal sharing of family responsibilities. This is especially important in the light of the trend towards smaller families in Japan, which often diminishes the ability of the basic social group to care for its members, particularly children, the disabled and the elderly. I would like to take this opportunity to announce that in April of this commemorative Year Japan ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child as part of its effort to address such concerns.

This series of plenary meetings of the General Assembly has given us an invaluable opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the various policies and programmes being adopted and executed by other Member States. The many examples we have heard of the success of these efforts spur us to make further efforts of our own. My delegation believes that in following up the Year we should pay greater attention to the family in the national policies we formulate. It is imperative that our policies be based on respect for the individual, rather than focusing on the family as a whole.

The pivotal role of the family in the development process will be a key issue at the upcoming World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. These high-level forums can make an invaluable contribution to ensuring the success of the Year and an effective follow-up to it. As we come to the end of the International Year of the Family we should remain active in promoting the inherent strength of the family and in strengthening its role and functions in contributing to national, regional, and international sustainable development.

Mrs. Sirelkhtim (Sudan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The President *(interpretation from Arabic)*: I now call on the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, Mr. N. H. Beigman.

Mr. Biegman (Netherlands): In the Netherlands, the working definition of a family is "a living unit in which the care and the upbringing of the child takes place". We attach great importance to the breadth of this definition and to the concept of "living unit". Government policies and specific measures may affect these living units, but they are not focused on or geared to families as such. They focus on the individual citizens, and particularly the children, belonging to the families, or the living units.

As has been stated on earlier occasions, the Government of the Netherlands, because of this national policy, was at first somewhat reluctant to accept the idea of an International Year of the Family. However, the Netherlands Government ultimately decided to join in the preparations, and it established an independent National Committee provided with a substantial Government subsidy and corporate sponsorship.

Special attention has been given to a number of activities and projects in fields such as living units in which there are young children, focusing on people in socially deprived conditions and people in "special" circumstances; assisting migrant living units in the process of integration into Netherlands society, using specially designed methods to educate very young children and their mothers; enhancing the equality of the various living units in the Netherlands, based on cultural, religious and personal preferences; and finally, consciousness-raising, in particular raising the consciousness of fathers.

Hence, after this somewhat hesitant start, the year of the family in the Netherlands has provided a basis for socially relevant activities and projects. The Netherlands National Committee participated actively in the closing

conference of the International Year of the Family in Montreal last week, with a view to fostering acceptance and recognition of alternative family arrangements. Two international congresses, in October and November, will supplement this development, one on "Children on the Move", dealing with the situation of abducted, adopted and refugee children, the other with single-parent families.

Please allow me to explain, briefly, the Netherlands' position and to elucidate what we consider to be "a family". The family concept as such generally implies a variety of notions. While the Netherlands recognizes the family as a basic unit of society, we also recognize the diversity of family life, lifestyles and structures within and between societies. This diversity has been confirmed by findings of the World Economic Survey, which states that at present about 35 per cent of all households worldwide are run by women. Government policy in the Netherlands is therefore geared to individuals in all their various situations. This includes families, comparable social units and those who do not live in a family. We wish to underline that in our society, apart from the traditional family comprising a married father and mother and their children, other forms of living together also exist: for example, single-parent units - mostly only a mother with her children - and unmarried individuals who live together, of opposite sexes or of the same sex.

In our opinion, it is not for a government to hand down a judgement regarding these various forms of living together. The government should focus on the upbringing and education of children. In our opinion, children should be the focus of our attention, whether they are living at home or have left home but remain dependent - for example those who, because of their studies or for various other reasons, are temporarily away from home - or, of course, are homeless. Because its policy is focused on children rather than on the family as such, the Netherlands does not have anything like a family policy, which makes it difficult for us to go along with international positions regarding such policies. They just do not apply to the situation in the Netherlands.

In a worldwide context, family structures, traditions and values differ so markedly that it seems unlikely that international consultations on family matters could result in widely applicable international measures to strengthen family life. The Netherlands Government is concerned that a debate at the global level could become value-laden and might specifically be used to promote negative views about, or even bias and discrimination against, types of households other than the traditional nuclear family.

In closing, let me stress that we feel very strongly that attention to families in all their varieties should never lead to diminished attention to the rights of the individual. In the end, all living units are composed of individuals, and it is respect for the rights and dignity of the individual that can promote greater understanding between people, nations and cultures.

The President: *(interpretation from Arabic)*: I now call on Mr. José Bernard Pallais Arana, the Vice Minister for Foreign Relations of Nicaragua.

Mr. Pallais Arana (Nicaragua) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The staggering changes taking place on the international scene affect the scope of relations between States themselves as well as relationships among social groups, which within those societies have their separate identities, lifestyles and cultures. The family, commonly regarded as the basic unit of society and the focus of the social organization network, is undergoing a rapid process of change, which in some societies is affecting the very concept of the family. The Cairo Conference reaffirmed the concept of the family as a natural and fundamental nucleus of society.

The acute needs stemming from the demands of development, economic growth, structural adjustments and extreme poverty have all had an effect on the structure of the family, leading to the mass incorporation of women into the labour market, changing the relations between the sexes, thereby having an impact on the size of families and giving rise to an increase in early motherhood and the breakdown of marriages. In countries where conflicts have taken on a dimension of social violence, families have been affected by forced separation, displacement and family disintegration. In all these cases children are affected the most.

Our country took an active part in the regional Latin American-Caribbean preparatory meeting for the International Year of the Family, organized by the

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and on that occasion we adopted the Cartagena Declaration and the regional proposal for the preparation of courses of action to assist the families of Latin America and the Caribbean.

That Declaration recognized the complex processes of change taking place in the institution of the family in Latin America and the Caribbean; the close relationships between the family and the processes of democratization and peace; the importance that cooperation among the countries of the region and support from international agencies and non-governmental organizations has for the policies, plans and programmes in support of families.

We are certain that the agreements reflected in that Declaration and in the regional proposal will help to strengthen the family as a leading actor in providing for its own well-being; will promote its integration in relations of equity, solidarity, cooperation, affection and respect; and will foster broad-ranging and responsible concerted action between the Government and society for the overall benefit of the family.

In the governmental programme outlined by Her Excellency President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, there is a clear statement of political resolve to direct resources to the full ethical, economic and social recovery of the Nicaraguan nuclear family, after a decade of political and military conflict.

The family passes on values and rules of behaviour and plays an important role in economic, political, social and cultural aspects of society. It is the smallest social area for interaction on a day-to-day basis and for the enhancement of the well-being of the individual.

Traditionally, the Nicaraguan family has assigned different roles to men and women; however, this situation has changed as a result of socio-economic factors that have arisen in recent decades and have led to growing participation by women in economic activity, thus leading to a redefinition of the roles of men and women.

Nicaragua's political Constitution stipulates that the family is the fundamental nucleus of society and has a right to the protection of society and the State and to the safeguarding of its rights. The present Constitution, and the laws adopted under the Constitution, provide for the rights of the family.

President Chamorro has paid particular attention to the restoration of the moral principles and values of the Nicaraguan family, to the promotion of respect within the family unit and, above all, to the promotion of family unity as the primary foundation of society and a fundamental factor in national reconciliation. The Government of Nicaragua is today determined to conserve such basic values of the Nicaraguan family as solidarity among family members and, above all, the family's educational function as a transmitter of moral and civic values.

In carrying out the objectives of the International Year of the Family the Government of Nicaragua has set up a National Commission for the International Year of the Family, with the participation of representatives from various State Ministries, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The social cabinet entrusted the National Commission with specific duties, including the preparation of a preliminary draft family code to consolidate and update existing legislation, the dissemination of the goals of the International Year of the Family at the national and international levels and the performance of activities designed to promote family integration in the community.

The process of curricular change being carried out by the Ministry of Education has placed special emphasis on the promotion of family values as the basic axis of human development and democratic life. Since 1993 parents have been actively participating in that Ministry's consultative councils and in schools and institutes at the basic-education level.

One of the main functions of the Nicaraguan Institute for Women is the protection of women in the family and society in an attempt to integrate them, on an equal footing, into the country's economic and social relationships, with special emphasis on the overall health of women and children.

At the same time, the programmes of the Ministry of Health dedicated to so-called reproductive health place special emphasis on promoting women's self-esteem and on strengthening the family nucleus and unit. The Ministry of Health, in an effort to improve the population's quality of life, has introduced profound changes in the organization and the provision of services. Management has been made more democratic through community participation by the creation of departmental health councils, which have had a decisive impact on the organization of services and their effectiveness.

Similarly, the policies of the Ministry of Labour have attempted to guarantee a minimum wage to workers free from gender-based discrimination, in keeping with the basic needs of the average Nicaraguan family and urban and rural labour demands. The Ministry has also tried to achieve collective agreements and compacts to guarantee incentives such as accident insurance, supplements based on seniority, maternity protection and indemnity based on seniority at the end of the labour contract. Further, the Nicaraguan Institute for Agrarian Reforms is proceeding to assign crop-land titles to families in order to promote the preservation of family heritage, thus maintaining family unity.

But above and beyond the International Year, the family is the principal focus of the Chamorro Government's policy of national reconciliation. We believe that peace is a process that must begin in the Nicaraguan family, a family that has been divided by a decade of wars and antagonisms of all kinds. We believe that we have taken a significant step along this arduous path and that our achievements will be irreversible.

The President *(interpretation from Arabic)*: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Reaz Rahman, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Rahman (Bangladesh): Five years ago the Assembly decided to proclaim the year 1994 the International Year of the Family. Since then, concentrated preparatory work has been undertaken by Governments, the United Nations Secretariat, specialized agencies, regional Commissions and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to give substance to the importance of the family and to highlight awareness of it on the part of policy-makers and the public - the family not only as the basic unit of social life but as a key motivator for promoting environmental supportive growth, societal justice, democracy and human rights at all levels of society. We would like to pay a special tribute to President Amara Essy for his opening address and to the Secretary-General for comprehensively outlining the steps taken to project this issue now and in the future.

In launching the International Year of the Family and declaring 15 May as the annual International Day of Families, the international community seeks to highlight the need for continuity in promoting implementation and follow-up measures that will keep the basic notion of the family in the foreground and the family's importance as a crucial agent in and beneficiary of the development process and as an essential nucleus in society for generating moral and ethical values.

Several key perceptions have emerged that are gaining widespread recognition and that need to be further encouraged and strengthened. First and foremost, there is the perception that major instruments of the United Nations, be they on human rights or on the evolution of social policies or global programmes of action on development, are increasingly being centred on the human being and are, in turn, calling for the widest possible protection and assistance to be accorded to the family. A second fundamental element is gender equality, women's equal participation in employment, shared parental responsibility and the significance of the rights of children. Third is the recognition that, despite diversity in the various concepts of the family in different social, cultural and political systems, there are many common elements in the problems faced by families in all parts of the world. Perhaps most important is the growing awareness, as the President of the General Assembly pointed out, that

> "social policies must respond to holistic, family-centred principles." *(Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-ninth Session, Plenary Meeting, 35th meeting, [p. 8])*

Indeed, the resolution adopted by the Assembly at its forty-seventh session expressed awareness that families are the fullest reflection, at the grass-roots level, of the

strengths and weaknesses of the social and developmental welfare environment and as such offer a uniquely comprehensive and synthesizing approach to social issues.

Today, the basic challenge facing us is to bolster the position of families as a major catalyst for social progress and development and to reinforce their role as the key nucleus for promoting moral and ethical values, education, rights and responsibilities and the fundamental foundation for democracy. If the impressive achievements of the International Year of the Family are to have any last effect, a crucial imperative will be to consolidate and implement follow-up actions to the goals we have set together.

Bangladesh has been attaching due importance to the observance of the Year and to looking beyond it. A broad array of activities have been undertaken to celebrate it. These include a series of constructive activities befitting families across the country. Emphasis on gender equality in society and in the family has been an additional factor in the creation of a greater awareness of the role of individual members within this the basic unit of society.

A major target that has been reached is unanimous recognition of the role of families in fostering sustained growth and sustainable development. Bangladesh's Department of Social Services is implementing a number of programmes, both in urban and in rural areas, to ensure balanced socio-economic development of families. Emphasis is being laid on both moral and material family development. The areas of this development include health, sanitation, education, the skills required for self-employment, and recreation.

Families are truly the building-blocks of societies and the essential fabric of human relationships. We are deeply committed to appropriately supporting and sustaining families as the means of providing a better future for our children and as a fundamental social unit to strengthen the local community, national society and the global community.

The President *(interpretation from Arabic)*: I call on the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein, Mrs. Claudia Fritsche.

Mrs. Fritsche (Liechenstein): In the past, families have often been defined as the "smallest democracy at the heart of societies". When the International Year of the Family was being launched, it was affirmed that families as the fundamental group units of society are entitled to maximum protection and assistance to enable them to fulfil their roles in ensuring the development of their individual members and of society.

Ideally, families are the primary source of nurturing and care. They transmit values and culture and form an oasis in a competitive world. Families continue to be the primary caring institutions. They look after members who are young or elderly, ill or disabled. It is through the family that children acquire the knowledge and skills that will serve them as adults.

There is no simple view of the family, and no easy definition of family policy. To some degree, all policies affect families. Yet, policies and programmes tend to be based on concepts and family models which, because of the major changes that most societies have undergone in recent decades, may no longer reflect reality.

The traditional forms of family are changing. Improvements in communication and access to information enable individual family members to have increased contact with ideas and behavioural norms that go beyond their traditional spheres. Economic factors force families to separate when members migrate in search of employment. Within a relatively short time, extended families have shrunk, and single-parent families are no longer the exception. Today, between a quarter and a third of all households worldwide are headed by single parents, of whom 90 per cent are women. One of the most demanding aspects of the daily lives of many families, especially single-parent and female-headed families, is the constant need to balance work and familial responsibilities. There is a great need for social-support systems appropriate to individual cases.

One of the major objectives of the International Year is the achievement of gender equity in the family, which entails the equal sharing of responsibilities. The sharing of roles by men and women requires new perspectives and patterns of partnership. It therefore seems necessary that major attention be given to

examining and fostering new roles and responsibilities for men. Fathers could be given wider access to education in family life, and parental leave and other incentives could be provided, to encourage and enable them to play new, wider roles, especially with regard to home-making, child care and family planning. Affected as they are by continuing social, economic, cultural and political pressures, women should be enabled to explore new opportunities for education and employment and to balance work and familial responsibilities.

Families are valuable resources for the prevention of crime and delinquency. An important issue is the prevention of domestic violence. Violence against women and children is pervasive and affects families everywhere and in all social classes. Women experience violence as a form of control that limits their ability to pursue options in almost every area of life. It hinders the human development of women themselves, and it affects the well-being of children and families.

We welcome the appointment of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women. This is one of the most important results of the World Conference on Human Rights, which took place in Vienna last year. In agreeing to appoint a Special Rapporteur, the Conference recognized gender-based violence in both public and private spheres as a human-rights violation.

The activities instituted by the Liechtenstein National Coordinating Committee for the International Year of the Family were based on the following considerations. Changes in human lives, and particularly in family life, are associated with intense emotional and social experiences; in living through these changes, awareness is beneficial to both the personality and the community, and, accordingly, can mitigate or even prevent the emergence of psychological and social problems, such as impoverishment, addiction and suicidal tendencies; ensuring the means of existence, raising children and partnership are just a few of the many tasks a family has to cope with; families are psychologically and socially overburdened and, accordingly, require support and assistance.

One of the key considerations in the implementation of the planned activities in Liechtenstein was that the family is where the changes occur and that the implementation of measures in support of the home and of the family should not lead to State control of the family. In creating family-support infrastructures, the State and its institutions are only the backdrop. The stage on which the action takes place is the family itself. Supportive action should be something shared, something creative and innovative.

It was against this background that a programme for the provision of assistance to families in times of crisis and periods of transition was initiated. Further programmes focus on drug addiction within the family, sexual exploitation of children, current problems in the field of education, and crisis management within the family.

It has been said frequently that the family, being the natural and fundamental group unit of society, is the fullest reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of a community. In spite of the many changes in society that have influenced its role, the family continues to provide the natural framework for the emotional and material support that is essential to the growth and development of its members. A strong and democratic family should be promoted as an important element of an equally strong and democratic society.

The President *(interpretation from Arabic)*: I now call on the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Gholamali Khoshroo.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation wishes to begin its remarks by acknowledging and endorsing the rationale of the General Assembly's unanimous proclamation of 1994 as the International Year of the Family - a Year to instill a global conviction to employ intensified action and international cooperation on behalf of families in order to advance social progress and development.

The family, as the most fundamental institution for human growth and happiness, has, in recent decades, been threatened by structural and cultural transformations in Western societies. The intrusion of the market approach into everyday life has severely weakened the belief and practices which were common in family,

religious and local communities. Such new processes have created serious moral problems rather than technical ones.

As modernism proceeds, strong ties in traditional communities become weaker and weaker, while the need to care for each other grows stronger and stronger. Thus, we are in a paradoxical situation: to become more modern leads to a reliance on the market and bureaucracy, which contributes to the destruction of modernism itself. To solve this dilemma, we must attach utmost importance to the family, education and religion. Through this restructuring of everyday life and of social systems we can create a proper balance between moral obligation and individual freedom. It is very sad that in the current situation the foundation of the family has become so weak that individual autonomy has replaced moral and social responsibility. Accordingly, narrow individualism, which dramatically focuses on immediate personal affairs, is continuously developing at the cost of public happiness and social coherence. It is unfortunate that the mass media, in their competition in the market of popular art and culture, are provoking utilitarian and hedonistic individualism, by dramatizing immediate desire, emotional fantasies and trivial concerns.

Such maximization of self-interest, accompanied by the increasing attachment to the comforts of life, has led to the dissolution of social ties and family relations. These tragic changes in Western societies have resulted in a high proportion of divorce - almost one out of two marriages - widespread reluctance to marry, and an increasing acceptance of premarital and extra-marital sexual relations. Worse still, the spread of sexual abuse within the family and domestic violence have brought about an increasing number of runaways and crimes.

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has, since its inception, made every effort to create a conducive and encouraging environment for families to flourish in. Articles 10, 21, 29, 30 31 and 43 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran frame laws, regulations and national plans connected with families and their stability. These constitutional provisions are based on the principles of the Islamic law and code of conduct.

Thus, the Islamic Republic of Iran regards the family as the core of society and supports any movement that contributes to its strengthening and enhancement. Declaring 1994 the International Year of the Family emphasized the need for more intense attention to and a thorough re-evaluation of existing difficulties faced by families in the world.

The Islamic Republic of Iran supports the initiatives launched by the International Year of the Family because it believes in the need for expanding collective efforts to eliminate common problems. We have participated wholeheartedly and actively in these activities. The first step was the formation of a national committee comprising various organizations within the country. These organizations manage the affairs of children, women, youth, the elderly and the disabled. The many sessions held by this committee resulted in the compilation of a national report.

Specific examples of Iran's initiatives this year include a review of the Family Protection Law with help from the Office of Women's Affairs and the United Nations Children's Fund in Tehran; the art competition staged by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for children in refugee camps; the construction of libraries at refugee camps in a collaborative effort between the UNHCR and the Ministry of the Interior; the implementation of a nationwide immunization of children against polio by the Ministry of Health; the mobilization of the mass media to promote the International Year of the Family; the convening of a regional conference on family issues held with the cooperation of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities; the convening of youth seminars on marriage and the family and the Parents and Teachers Conference on the International Year of the Family.

The International Year of the Family is an opportunity to inform everyone of what countries have done or intend to do to reinforce and strengthen the family institution. Here is the opportune moment to share the fruits of our labour, our insights into difficulties, and our successful solutions. Without a doubt, enhanced regional and international cooperation in matters relating to the family and the preparation and implementation of proposals and plans to align socio-economic development

with family interests will open the way for future cooperation in similar endeavours.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.